

The Bishop's Charge to the 167th Synod of the Diocese of Huron

Seventh Sunday of Easter (Sunday after Ascension Day)

May 24 2009

Your Kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)

Sisters and brothers: I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ: risen-ascended-glorified!

I have a sense of trepidation as I stand in the Cathedral pulpit this evening to offer my first charge to Synod. When I recall those who have done this, (Cronyn, Hellmuth, Williams, Luxton, Jones and the like), my anxiety is not assuaged. However, God calls us to faithfulness even when we might not be particularly comfortable so here goes....

I would like to welcome each and every one of you to this 167th Synod of the Diocese of Huron. Together we gather in God's name in Christ and in the love of the Holy Spirit to be church just as the diocesan family has done for over 150 years. In all that we do we celebrate God's love as we strive to discern God's will in our time and in our context.

Transitions and welcome

This past while has certainly been a time of transition for it was almost one year ago that Bishop Bruce announced his retirement. This is an apt opportunity for me to thank Bruce for his faithful ministry as bishop of this diocese. Not being one to do things in half measures, Bruce gave it everything he had and then some...something that we are all acutely aware. I very much enjoyed working with Bruce and continue to miss the wonderful experiences we shared an Episcopal ministry. I am confident that I speak for all of us when I wish Bruce and Jane a long, happy and faith-full retirement. It is so appropriate that we shall have an opportunity to honor the Howes along with other retirees at the Synod banquet tomorrow night.

I would be quite remiss if I failed to thank Archbishop Percy and Bishops Bob and Jack for their assistance and support in filling the Episcopal deficit this past year. They were always ready to ordain, confirm or simply represent the diocese when I could not be present. The Archdeacons, Church House Staff and the Dean also deserve our deepest gratitude for accepting the extra challenges brought about by the extended transition period. On a personal note, I appreciate the love, prayers and tangible support given so freely by so many of the Huron family.

I would also like, of course, to welcome Bishop-elect Terry Dance. It is a particular joy and blessing to have a friend and colleague join the Episcopal team. What a combination. I look forward to working with Terry. Terry has a Trinitarian passion: love of God in Christ – love for God's people and a love for Huron. We eagerly and prayerfully anticipate Terry's consecration on June 6th as a bishop of the church. I know

that that service will be another wonderful witness of whom we are as God's people in Christ.

I would also like to welcome to Synod my good friend Bishop Dennis Drainville of the Diocese of Quebec. Dennis is our Synod speaker this year. If you have an opportunity to meet Dennis, it will not take long for you to experience his deep and passionate Christian faith. Dennis, welcome to Huron; for this next while you are one of us as we gather in Synod.

I extend greetings to Faisal Joseph, Past President of the Islamic Centre, Southwestern Ontario. Also in our midst over the time Synod gathers is Fr. Drossos of the Greek Orthodox Church. Welcome.

Your Kingdom Come (Matthew 6.10)

The theme under girding Synod this year (and dove tailing with Youth Synod) is the second petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom Come". This petition captures succinctly the ever-present yearning of the paschal community for God to usher in God's reign. We all know things are not as they should be. As Karl Barth would remind us, only God can do God's work yet we have our part to play as gospel people. Listen to the Bishops of the Church gathered at last summer's Lambeth Conference reflect about God's reign.

"God's mission is holistic; its orientation is toward the redemption of the whole of creation. For Anglicans, indeed the whole Church, the Gospel is not just the proclamation of individual redemption and renewal, but the renewal of society under the Reign of God: the ending of injustice and the restoration of right relationship with God and between human beings and between humanity and creation. We recognize that social justice issues and global relationships are very complex and powerful.

The Gospel given to us by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth demands our commitment to the poor, the marginalized, the exploited, refugees, indigenous peoples, the internally displaced, and victims of war, terror and natural disaster. We recognize the critical need to reaffirm, develop and strengthen our responsibility to the powerless who have no voice." (Lambeth Indaba, page 15)

During times of stress, fatigue, fear and uncertainty, we can be lulled into abandoning the life-giving gospel imperative demanding that we live for others. There is no option here. In that vein there's nothing subtle about tonight's witness of scripture:

...from the prophet Isaiah: what is the fast that God chooses?

The answer: "... to loose the bonds of injustice
To undo the thongs of the yoke
To let the oppressed go free

And to break every yoke: (Isaiah 58.6)

If faithful, what shall we be called?

“you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah 58:12b)

In the epistle reading the author of James rips through our complacency with searing clarity:

“What good is it my brothers and sisters if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”
(James 2: 14,17)

The gospel reading challenges us to the core of our being.... Are you sheep or goats?

“Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25.40)

I hope that at least three things will spring from our Synod theme.

- 1) That the Holy Spirit will speak to us in a transformative way in this liturgy and in our time together so that we will be changed.
- 2) That every congregation in the diocese will affirm or re-affirm the gospel imperative demanding that we be justice makers (sheep not goats).
- 3) That Synod will consider mandating a ministry group to enable the Huron family to embrace that call to be ‘repairers of the breach-- restorers of streets to live in. Of course there are so many resources to aid us including the UN Millennium Development Goals, the Five Marks of Mission, the scriptures themselves.

The life of Synod

During the course of our time together, we will receive snapshots of where we have been and indicators of where we might journey as God’s faithful people. The various reports, motions, reflections and times of fellowship will enable us to paint a composite picture of who we are in Huron including the challenges and blessings of being church in our time. An integral part of all this is the opportunity of hearing from the various ministries of Huron Church House. So listen for...

-Bishop Ed Leidel’s incredible passion for congregations and the life therein.

-The Reverend Eleanor Caruana and the exciting and creative gifts she and her team bring to gift planning and stewardship.

-And it doesn’t take long to be around the Reverend Sue Malpus to catch a sense of her unbridled enthusiasm for young Christians in our diocesan family.

-Canon Paul Rathbone and his team are tasked with overseeing our financial and administrative life in an ever-changing and challenging environment.

- And just ask Canon Sue Tite or Archdeacon Willie Kammerer what they do on your behalf on any given day. It would amaze you.
And surrounding all of us with their love, professionalism and support is your dedicated Huron Church House Staff who see it not as a job but as a ministry.

In addition to welcoming Bishop Drainville, we also look forward to hearing from the Very Reverend John vanNostrand Wright of the Anglican Foundation and from Ms. Fiona Brownlee representing the Council of the North.

Strategic Planning - a way through the wilderness

Years ago I recall reading that when congregations move into stress and decline, the natural tendency is to assume that the faith community is not as effective at doing what it has always done in ministry. The natural response to the stress seems to be a re-doubling of congregational efforts using the 'same-old same-old brush' and then revitalization will occur. Typically this is not the case. Communities of faith can never journey back to what was. The reality is that we are always being invited to journey forward into the unknown of the future infused with a confidence that God's Spirit will guide us into transformation...that God will lead us exactly where we need to go. To stay in Goshen for the ancient Hebrews was death. For them, new Life and transformation came about only in the chaos, pain and uncertainty of the wilderness journey. If I were to use baptismal imagery, I would assert that healthy faith communities are always dying to an old way of life so that they might rise to new life in Christ.

Simply put: - the church of our grandparents is gone
- the church of our youth is gone
- in fact for many of us the church and context in which our children were baptized is no more

We are to live as gospel people today not somewhere in the murky past.

Bishop Bruce referred to this dynamic in a recent charge when he challenged us to 'Imagine Huron' in a new way...to imagine not who we are but what we might become in Christ's name. In response to the challenge of our bishop, we began a strategic planning process that included the Imagine Huron Report, the Imagine Huron Implementation Task Force, a request for a new vision/purpose statement and latterly the commissioning of the 'Who is My Neighbour Report.' This newly minted report by consultant Myrlene Boken describes in much detail who we are as Anglican Christians in the Southwestern Ontario of our time. Myrlene's report is simply one of many tools available to help us prepare for the journey ahead. It is now time to 'break open' the report. I am impressed with the skill-set of the Strategic Planning team chaired by Bp-elect Terry. I am confident that they will enable us to move to the place that God in Christ wills us to be.

Indigenous Ministry

The challenge of reconciliation and healing continues both in the indigenous and non-indigenous communities across Canada and beyond. The deep scars left by the

residential schools experience is still felt by indigenous Anglicans both nationally and within our diocesan family. Indigenous Anglicans strive to re-claim their voice by inviting all Anglicans to journey to a different place. Part of the covenant of 1994 declares this hope and it states:

“Under the guidance of God’s Spirit we agree to do all we can to call our people into unity in a new self determining community within the Anglican Church of Canada”

To this end, Bishop Mark MacDonald is now exercising dynamic ministry as the National Indigenous Bishop (we look forward to Bp MacDonald speaking at this year’s 53rd weekend next week). It is also a great diocesan honor that the next Sacred Circle(a national gathering of Indigenous Anglicans) is to be held at Port Elgin this August. Within the diocesan circle of ministry, LAIC continues to exercise a prophetic ministry as we journey together. Please give prayerful support to the ongoing journey toward healing and reconciliation.

Partnerships

The partnerships with the Dioceses of Mthatha and Brandon continue. The partnership with Mthatha has been renewed for another five years as we look forward to deepening our relationship. At this very moment, there are a number of Huron University College students traveling with the new Dean of Theology (the Reverend Dr. Bill Danaher) in South Africa. Part of their itinerary will take them to Mthatha where they will worship at St. John ‘s Cathedral and meet with Bishop Sitembele. Bishop-elect Terry and Diane Dance will be traveling to South Africa this summer and will no doubt take our love, prayers and good wishes to our sisters and brothers in Christ. Nationally, we are also planning to look at how we might enhance the relationship between Brandon and the Deanery of Essex.

Human Sexuality

The two largest files on my desk are the ones on human sexuality and St. Aidan’s Windsor. These files and related issues have consumed what I feel to be an inordinate amount of my time as bishop. I want to speak first of some issues of human sexuality.

Last year’s Synod joined a number of Canadian dioceses in passing a motion requesting the Bishop to consider moving forward with the blessing of civil marriages between same gender couples. Bishop Bruce gave his concurrence to that motion but was quite clear that nothing had changed in Huron. As I recall, he indicated that he would attend the Lambeth Conference and consult with fellow bishops before making a decision about moving forward or not. Soon after Synod, Bishop Howe retired and the Diocese moved into transition. As Diocesan Administrator, I made it quite clear that only the Diocesan Bishop could respond to such a request of Synod.

As is typical of life today; things have moved into a very different place since the Synod of last year.(Lambeth Conference/House of Bishops has met twice/ individuals and remnant congregations have left the Anglican Church of Canada/Council of General Synod has met/Anglican Consultative Council has met/Primates have met/an Anglican Covenant is being designed/ the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Communion office have been issuing communiqués/ and on and on) As well, other dioceses across Canada have made decisions to consider moving ahead or not. A curious observation from a personal one is it that like it or not, we are learning to live together in a context of greater diversity across the face of the church Perhaps the Holy Spirit is speaking to the church? No matter, dioceses are moving in slightly different ways.

The Diocese of Ottawa, for example, has decided to move ahead slowly and carefully toward the General Synod of 2010. Bishop Chapman has embraced an ‘experiential discernment’ model which means that they are going to observe what things might look like by giving permission for one parish to move forward once appropriate protocols and guidelines are in place.

The Diocese of Niagara has embraced a prophetic model infused with a strong sense that the Holy Spirit is calling them to move forward again when protocols and guidelines are in place.

The bishops of Toronto have recently embraced a pastoral rather than a legislative approach. They intend to build on the 2007 National House of Bishops statement on sexuality that allows for a celebratory Eucharist with appropriate prayers but not a nuptial blessing for a civilly married same gender couple. As with the other dioceses, they are going to move ahead carefully when appropriate protocols, guidelines and evaluative tools are in place.

I must confess that I’m quite torn on the issue and in that sense ponder whether I actually might reflect where a significant part of the church might be. On the one hand, I agree with the National House of Bishops desire to “develop the most generous pastoral response possible within the current teaching of the church”. On the other hand, my catholic sensitivity of whom we are as church mandates that I take very seriously the Archbishop of Canterbury’s request that we embrace a ‘season of gracious restraint’ in the matter of same-gender blessings. To state the obvious, nothing is easy here!

The wider church has asked us to maintain a moratoria on

- 1) The blessing of same-sex unions
- 2) Cross border interventions
- 3) The ordination of bishops in same-sex relationships

Until the General Synod of
2010.

Huron has and continues to uphold this request even though other jurisdictions have aggressively fractured the moratoria.

So here's where I am

As we journey to General Synod 2010 in Halifax, I intend to embrace the pastoral model. It is where I suspect Huron's heart is. For further clarification, I am committing to maintaining the moratoria as requested by the wider Anglican family. For me, this season of 'gracious restraint' will take us to Halifax 2010. We find ourselves in an 'in-between time' that must be used to prepare for the national gathering and beyond. I also reaffirm the National House of Bishops' statement on Sexuality that commits to the most generous pastoral response possible within the current teaching of the church. To that end, I am asking the Diocesan Doctrine and Worship Committee (or a sub group) to synthesize and make available the most recent and relevant material to aid in this discernment time. (This is a long list that includes the House of Bishops statements/The Rothsay report/The Galilee report/The Windsor Report/The Anglican Consultative Council statements/Primates' communiqués/Lambeth Indaba reflections/Council of General Synod communiqués/ Anglican Covenant process...see why my file is so large!) I'm also requesting the Doctrine and worship Committee (or a sub group) to develop appropriate protocols, guidelines and evaluative tools to enable us to move forward with appropriate liturgies to celebrate the love, mutual fidelity and support that gay and lesbian Anglicans model every day for the church and wider community. I envisage that the framework for this would be Eucharistic in nature with approved intercessory prayers but with no nuptial blessing (as per the 2007 statement of the House of Bishops).

When the Doctrine and Worship Committee has done their work, I am prepared to consider giving permission for those requesting to move ahead (using of course, the approved liturgies).

St. Aidan's Windsor

You are well aware that the Diocese of Huron is involved in a court case over the trusteeship of the buildings that house St. Aidan's Windsor. Part of that faith Community has opted to leave the Anglican Church of Canada. The other part continues as St. Aidan's Anglican Church of Canada under the able leadership of Canon Steve Harnadek. As mandated by the court, both communities are worshipping in the building while the court case proceeds to its conclusion. Because we are involved in litigation, I am limited in what I can and should say. But I can ask for two things:

- 1) please pray for everybody involved and especially the diocesan group that meets regularly on Saturday evenings for worship and if you happen to be in Windsor please join them for worship
- 2) Please be aware that the cost of litigation is, of course, stressing our diocesan finances.

We did not initiate the court action but find that we must defend the Christian Community of St. Aidan's Windsor that continues as an integral part of the Diocese of Huron. I particularly want to thank Chancellor Elwood and Archdeacon Jim Dugan for the incredible work they are doing working along with Canon Sue Tite, Archdeacon Jane

Humphreys and myself. The five of us comprise the working team on the St. Aidan's situation.

Diocesan Finances

You will hear a detailed report on Diocesan finances, which present a huge challenge for this year and beyond. The facts giving rise to this stress are well known including...

- 1) Sharply declining revenues from investment income
- 2) Weakening parish apportionment revenue
- 3) The closing or amalgamation of congregations which has the effect of reducing apportionment revenue
- 4) Recent expansion of Diocesan staff
- 5) Unbudgeted litigation costs

Your staff is looking at ways of faithfully responding to these very real challenges. I urge you to weigh carefully the pertinent reports that will speak of revenue issues, cost containment and revenue possibilities in a culture of abundance not scarcity. The diocesan financial situation and solution belong to all of us and so it should be.

Appointments

Archdeacon of Erie: The Reverend June Hough (replacing Archdeacon Ken Anderson who is retiring). A collation date will follow.

Chair of the Doctrine and Worship Committee: The Reverend Dr. Todd Townshend

To the Cathedral Chapter of Canons:

Re-titled:

Canon Historian: The Rev'd Canon Dr. Doug Leighton

Canon Precentor: The Rev'd Canon William Cliff

Appointed as:

Canon Theologian: The Reverend Dr. Todd Townshend

Canon Pastor: The Reverend Marian Haggerty

Canon Missioner: The Reverend Richard Jones

Canons:

The Reverend Allan Livingstone

The Reverend France Ouimet-Wilson
 The Reverend Tanya Phibbs
 The Reverend Tony Bouwmeester

Conclusion

As I travel ‘out and about’ this great diocese of ours, I repeatedly experience profound signs of new life and transformation. Most Sundays, I return home with an enthusiastic sense of hope and blessing. God is good and God is with us in Christ!

Here are some of the signs of vitality afoot...

- St. Mark’s Tecumseh dedicating a huge new expansion of church and parish hall next month
- The Holy Trinity St. George confirmation class welcoming me to worship with African drumming.
- Jazz Vespers at St. James’ Westminster known right across the great city of London.
- There’s nothing like traveling into Huron Deanery in the midst of snow squalls to experience a wonderful ordination service at St. John’s Brussels.
- St. James’ Paris having an afternoon confirmation service full of young middle-aged and older Anglicans gathering around 12 young persons celebrating their life in Christ!
- And what about the U2charist at this very Cathedral with people walking in off the streets to catch what is going on.
- And what a great time at the last deacons’ day at beautiful Grace Church West Lorne. We sat and dialogued and talked about our calling.
- What a great service at Youth Synod! Fifty young Anglicans – I celebrated, they did the work. The Church is in good shape – it was a wonderful gathering.
-

I could go on and on...

We are Huron! We are God’s people in Christ! We give God the glory and praise!

Sisters and brothers, I give all this to Jesus Christ: risen- ascended – glorified!

Amen and Amen

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